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# Sewing Tips For Knits



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## Sewing Tips for Knits

Sewing with knits is generally simple and easy and for this reason knit fabrics are very popular with home sewers.

Knits also reflect the fast pace of modern living. They resist wrinkles, require little care, are stretchy and comfortable to wear.

The intriguing textured surfaces and designs of the latest knits create fabrics that sometimes do not even resemble knit materials.

### Choosing the Pattern and Fabric

- Choose a pattern specifically for knits or one that includes knitted fabrics in the list of suggested fabrics.
- Choose a knit fabric suitable for the style of the garment. Single knits or jerseys and tricot knits are soft and stretchy and drape well. Double knits vary from lightweight to heavyweight. The lightweight ones are suitable for soft styles with some fullness. Medium- to heavyweights are thicker, firmer, less stretchy and best used for simple or tailored styles.

### Interfacings

- It is not usually necessary to line or underline a knit; however, it is advisable to use interfacing to support waistbands, buttonholes, collars, cuffs, pockets and lapels.

Choose an interfacing a little lighter in weight and as soft as the fabric. It should also have similar care requirements. Interfacings are divided into wovens and non-wovens, with heat fusible (press-on) types available in both groups. Fusible interfacings should be tested on a fabric sample, following manufacturer's instructions. Some interfacings have been specifically designed with some "give," for use with knit fabrics.

### Notions

- Use ballpoint machine needles to prevent piercing and breaking fabric yarns which could cause runs. Size #9 is best for lightweight knits and #11 for medium- to heavyweights.
- Polyester or cotton/polyester thread has some stretch and is recommended for sewing knits made from man-made fibers. For all-wool or all-cotton knits cotton thread is preferable, since polyester thread may cut the yarns of cotton or wool.
- Trims and zippers should be compatible with the weight, washability and care of the knit.

### Preshrinking

- Preshrinking is important because it removes sizing, and relaxes the tension exerted on a knit when it is rolled onto the bolt, thereby reducing later shrinkage. Preshrink a knit fabric (also zippers, trims, seam bindings) by



soaking it in warm water for 30 minutes or using the care treatment you will give the garment.

## Layout and Cutting Out

- Before laying on the pattern, make sure any center folds in the fabric can be removed by pressing. Stubborn creases can often be removed by using a presscloth wrung out in a vinegar-and-water solution. Always test press a sample of the fabric to make sure that the color does not run.
- Check the fabric for surface nap or color shading in one direction.
- Fold the fabric right sides together on a lengthwise rib which, in a knit, is the grain line.
- Pin the pattern to the fabric using the pattern instruction sheet layout. Use ballpoint pins or fine, long, sharp dressmakers' pins. Do not let knit fabric hang over the table edge.
- When cutting, keep fabric flat on the table and use very sharp cutting shears. Do not use pinking shears.

## Marking

- Transfer pattern markings to the fabric, using a smooth-edged tracing wheel and dressmakers' tracing paper marked "washable." When using a tracing wheel, reinforce the paper pattern with transparent tape to prevent tearing.
- On heavy knits and white or very light colors use tailor's tacks or chalk.

## Before You Start to Sew

- Test stitch a sample of your knit. Use 12 to 15 stitches per inch or a short narrow zigzag stitch. Some sewing machines have a special stretch stitch setting.
- Use a slightly loose, balanced tension. To check this make a row of stitching on two layers of fabric cut from the crosswise grain. Stretch. If both threads break at the same time the tension is even; if not, decrease the tension on the thread that breaks first.
- Use a fairly light pressure on the presser foot. To test for correct pressure, cut two strips of fabric of equal length. Stitch down the center. If the bottom piece becomes shorter than the top, the pressure is too great and vice-versa. Adjust and test again.
- When stitching seams, stretch the fabric gently with the left hand holding the fabric behind the presser foot and the right hand in front.
- If your machine is skipping stitches, replace the needle with a new one or insert tissue paper into the seam to increase bulk through the feed dogs. The tissue paper can easily be torn away.
- A roller presser foot is best to use with loopy knits or bulky open sweater knits as it prevents snagging of the yarns.

## Pressing

- Test press a scrap of fabric. Synthetic knits should be pressed at a low setting. Use a press cloth to avoid shine. If steam is required, use steam setting and a dry press cloth. Wherever possible press on the wrong side.
- Press in an up-and-down motion, as an ironing motion may stretch and distort the fabric. Press each seam before crossing it with another line of stitching.

## Making Your Garment

- To prevent stretching of the knit, keep the pattern pieces pinned to the fabric until you are ready to work on each piece.
- Where the pattern style suggests bias or bias binding, use the crosswise grain which is usually the direction of greatest stretch.
- Since knitted fabrics stretch, all curved seams (armholes, neckline, pants' crotch) and crosswise seams (shoulders, waistline) should be staystitched. Very stretchy knits should be stayed along these seams using preshrunk tape which is included when stitching the seam.
- To prevent curling on lightweight knits make a second row of stitching  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch (6 mm) away from the seamline through both seam allowances. Trim away excess fabric.

## Hems

- The tailor's hem is recommended for knits because it will give with the stretch of the garment. Allow the garment to hang 24 hours before hemming.

Pin the hem to the garment, matching seams and center front and back. Trim to an even width. Place a row of machine stitching  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch (6 mm) from the hem edge. If there is fullness at the top of the hem pull up the bobbin thread and ease the hem until it just fits the garment. Hand baste the hem about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch (1.3 cm) from the upper edge.

Turn back the hem as shown below. Insert the needle in the hem at the machine stitching, then pick up one thread in the garment. Bring the needle forward about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch (6 mm) and pick up a thread of the hem. Move the needle ahead  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch (6 mm) and pick up a thread of the garment. Continue in this manner. Do not pull the stitches too tightly.

